

Coverdell Progress Report

The report summarizes the activities of the Drug Analysis Laboratory at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health related to the Coverdell Forensic Sciences Improvement Grant for the time period October 1 – December 31, 2011.

Goals and Objectives of Project:

1. *to improve the timeliness and quality of forensic drug testing,*
2. *to reduce the testing backlog and;*
3. *to train, assist and employ forensic laboratory personnel to help eliminate the backlog..*

Progress Report

Goal 1. Improve the Timeliness and Quality of Forensic Drug Testing

A comprehensive review of all laboratory evidence handling, standard operating procedures, training materials and technical review documents was initiated. Several new procedures have been drafted and existing documents updated with the intent of including newer analytical techniques and technology, providing clear guidance on specimen sampling and analysis, refining data review and management to achieve the overarching goal of maintaining and improving the quality of forensic drug testing at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. This project is on-going with all facets to be completed by the end of the grant period.

During this reporting period, Coverdell funded chemist Hevis Lleshi analyzed casework independently and testified as required in municipal court. She analyzed 289 samples contained in 223 cases during the three month period with the objective of reducing testing turnaround time and decreasing the sample backlog. Despite her efforts the laboratory was unable to meet testing demand and there was an increase of 20 days in the time from when a sample was submitted to the laboratory and the reporting of results to law enforcement (73 days at the beginning of the grant period versus 93 at the end of the reporting period).

Goal 2. Reduce the testing backlog

There was a corresponding increase of the number of cases in backlog (6523 at the end of the reporting period as compared to 5579 at the beginning on the grant period). Several factors contributed to the decreased productivity: increased court testimony required of all chemists as the result of the *Meledez-Diaz v. Massachusetts* Supreme Court decision, a vacant (non-Coverdell)

chemist position and administrative tasks related to maintaining and improving the quality of analytical testing.

Goal 3. Train, assist and employ forensic laboratory personnel to help eliminate the backlog.

While no forensic training was funded in this grant year, Ms. Lleshi will continue to develop analytical capability as she has recently begun an intensive internal GC/MS training program.

Performance Measures

1. Average number of days to process a sample at the beginning of the grant period

73

2. Average number of days to process a sample at the end of the reporting period

93

3. Number of backlogged cases at the beginning of the grant period

5579

4. Number of backlogged cases at the end of the reporting period

6523

5. Number of forensic science personnel attending training

Not applicable as no funding was available for training.

6. Number of medical examiner personnel attending training programs

Not applicable